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# Non-State Actors and Democratization Process in Indonesia

**Have they lived to Citizenry Expectations?**

Jameaba Muyanja-Ssenyonga

2015

Muyanja-Ssenyonga, Jameaba

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Indonesia has over the last 15 years experienced dramatic events in its attempt to become a fully-fledged democratic nation. Ranked at 53 out of 167 countries (with an average score of 6.76 out of 10, performing well on electoral process and pluralism category (6.92 out of 10); 7.50 on functioning government; 6.11 on political participation; 5.63 on political culture<sup>1</sup>; and 7.65 on civil liberties). At the macroeconomic level, gains are touted as major achievements<sup>2</sup>, include the significant increase in Indonesia's income per capita from US\$850 (2000), US\$2164.9 (2008), US\$2257.6 (2009), US\$29265.4 (2010), US\$3441.9 (2011) to US \$3500 (2012), which is no mean feat, by any accounts. And this is country that which had to literary muddle through one of the most destabilizing episodes in its history as an Independent republic, which started with the 1997/1998 economic crisis that brought the banking sector and economy close to total collapse, until IMF bailout package came to the 'rescue'. Poverty reduction is also following the expected trajectory from above 15.58 percent (2007) to 11.37 percent (March 2013<sup>3</sup>).

Nonetheless, little headway has been made in reducing high underemployment and open unemployment rate as real economic growth since the onset of democratization has not been strong enough to create more jobs than the rate of additional job seekers let alone those already unemployed. Shortage of benefits of living in a new democracy, has sown seeds of disgruntlement, frustration, even disillusionment with the minimal impact democratization is having on economic growth and its distribution at the meso and micro levels; lower concrete poverty reduction across the urban-rural area divide and Java-Bali and outer Java Island chasm; signs of rising income inequality across income brackets of the population (based on Gini Index, which is above the 0.40 threshold (2011) that UNDP categorizes as the point beyond which income inequality poses the danger to triggering social instability); rising disparity in economic and social development between rural and urban areas; relatively more developed

\* *Non state actors* in this paper concentrates on Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), political parties, and academia.

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1 There is little doubt that the Achilles' heel lies in the difficulty a fledgling democracy faces in creating, cementing gains, and consolidating political culture.

2 BPS, 2012

3 Nonetheless, the basis on which poverty incidence is calculated has been criticized for being unrealistic and driven more by political considerations which in Indonesian associate poverty reduction with effectiveness of incumbent government than economic realities. Based on Central Bureau of statistics (Indonesian government statistics agency), poverty line which is used as a measure to categorize the poor and non-poor population stood at IDR 271 626 per person, is according to economic analysts (IERO III, 2013), is not sufficient to earn an average Indonesian a decent living

Western Indonesia and lagging Eastern Indonesia; still low quality in public representation in sub-national and national level (high public participation is only true in the eyes of political parties, economic powerful elites and groups, but continues a farfetched dream for many ordinary Indonesians (Purwatiningsih et al. 2004). Rising political patronage, (Robison and Hadiz, 2004), abuse of discretionary powers to further political ambitions (Sjahri, Katos, and Günther, 2013), which part of deep rooted pervasive corruption and collusion, affecting all tiers (sub national and national) and aspects of government (members of the legislature, judiciary, executive, law enforcement (the police and prosecution); members of the business community; bureaucracy (sub national<sup>4</sup> and national<sup>5</sup> level) (Dwiyanto et al. 2007; Mulyana-Ssenyonga, 2012); and growing signs of political and religious intolerance (Traub, June 21, 2013)<sup>6</sup>, all of which are undermining age-old social capital capacity (Gertler and Levine, 2002). Some political experts have reached the extent of citing early signs of elite capture in the public policy process, especially at the sub national government (Cheema, 2011; Kaufman, 2004; Purwanto and Van Klinken, 2009; Lele, 2011; Samadhi and Warouw, 2009); and dynasty politics at the sub national government level. The snail's pace at which democracy is impacting on economic wellbeing has been attributed to increasing entrenchment of old guards and wrangling over spoils among new political elites as well as between the new and the old (Bondiera and Levy, 2010). This is what Samadhi and Asgari (2009) refer to as democracy deficit. While many actors are responsible for the prevailing state of democracy deficit, one argument emphasizes the role, which the macro conditions under which Indonesian has been implemented that is fraught with conditionalities<sup>7</sup> imposed by external providers of financial and technical assistance in a state of paucity of other feasible alternatives for policy makers, as decisive in shaping the direction, form, and substance democracy has taken. Doubtless, a democratic process, which evolves has more to do with inputs and policy recommendations that originate from providers of assistance rather than grounded in the social, economic, political, even cultural needs, requirements, and fabric of the country, is prone to become dysfunctional, serving interests of those with access to corridors of power, while abnegating aspirations and interests of the public. Thus, the above trajectory of is very much in line with contentions of Chandrasekhar (2013) and Ghosh (2013).

Based on Indonesia's experience, one of the institutions which have assumed great importance is the existence of a strong civil society, which is associated with enhanced public participation, economic and political empowerment, and an important partner with state actors in the provision of basic services that range from education, health, sanitation to conservation. The increasing importance of civil society in Indonesia is in part attributable to the recognition of the important contribution non-governmental institutions make toward social and economic development and the coming to the fore of participatory development after decades of emphasis, almost obsession with the 'monolithic' role of the state as the sole agent in the development process. In light of that this research would like to conduct an assessment of the different (sometimes complementary and in others contradictory) roles various non-state actors have played in the democratization process, and the influence such roles have had on the form, direction, composition of democracy. In that backdrop, the current state of democratization raises as many questions as answers, both with respect

4 District and city government agencies

5 Ministries, agencies, and non-ministerial institutions

6 Supporters of candidates who lost elections could not accept final vote counts in a number of district/city government elections, leading to skirmishes with supporters of candidates who were declared winners (Palembang City head elections, Palopo city, South Sulawesi, among others)

7 Thus, the recipient does not only sing the song for the party that him (as the piper) but even the tones are set and follow the payer's whims and disposition

to democratization in Indonesia and other countries in the developing world. That said, roles non-state actors play in society in general and in the democratization process in particular tend to vary in accordance with social, cultural, level of development, and political economy contexts. This is borne out by a World Bank study on the performance of different institutions in Indonesia on participation carried out by the World Bank on Indonesia (Nerayan et al.1999:184). Findings of the study revealed though informal organizations score high on participation, while formal government institutions (health centers, hospitals, police and government Ministries, and *local governments*, show poor scores, and politicians and private enterprises register low scores; civil society organizations performed poorly on participation, while people's organizations (burial societies, informal credit groups, and kinship networks, do well. Informal local leaders and traditional councils register good score on participation, while religious groups are rated low on participation. To that end, participation in political party activities, which is considered to one of the gauges of deepening democracy, may not after all achieve that end. This is more so under contexts where formalisms in political parties constitute extensions of the deep divide between the civic public and primordial public, with the former based on values, norms, and practices that are regarded as acceptable and normal as part of the colonial legacy<sup>8</sup> but are perpetuated through education, training, and instruction, and induction, hence amoral both in private and public realms; while the latter, embedded into the richness of values, customs, and traditions of society, hence rooted in a deep moral space to which all members subscribe and are obligated to protect and serve, even if that means siphoning off chunks from the civic public (inherent, and sacred) (Lina, 2010):.

The objective of the research is to assess role(s) non state actors have played in Indonesian democratization process to date. The paper is explorative in nature, and uses multipronged qualitative research methodology. Techniques used to collect and analyze data included focused group discussion, in-depth interviews, literature review and content analysis. The coverage of the research is national and general in nature, with information sources drawn from academics and researchers, students activists, research papers, monographs, published reports, regulations that relate to the civil society activities, collaboration and cooperation in the realm of democracy, and central bureau of statistics and other relevant and reliable secondary data sources.

Study findings with regards to the contribution of not state actors, shows a varied pattern. The importance of non-state actors in democratization process, in Indonesia, as has been shown elsewhere, has been influenced by change in legal framework since reformation era from the repressive, not state actors mugging system that was in place during Suharto's 32 year rule to one that allows easy and unconditional establishment and running of civil society activities. In light of that, the contribution of non state actors to democratization process has been increasing and deepening in intensity in line with the process itself. Non state actors, contributed in no small measure to creating conditions that forced Suharto's regime to relinquish power in May 1998; have since the onset

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8 In Indonesia, malfeasance that plagues bureaucracy is in part traceable to the policy of the Dutch colonial regime that used coercive indirect rule to rule what later was to become Indonesia. Local personalities who were granted the authority and power rule over their fellow tribesmen were required to enforce stringent and draconian rules that involved among others, the duty to pay taxes (*upetis*), spend some time working on estates that largely belonged to Dutch private concession holders. This gave village rulers extensive powers to force their subjects to contribute to their well-being in many ways, beyond those sanctioned by the colonial government (including forced labor) for personal gains. Thus, the practice of expecting subjects to serve the bureaucracy rather than the other way round (public servants are supposed to be servants of the users of their services), including extortion, is a legacy of the Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia (Muyanja-Ssenyonga, 2011)



of democracy been part and parcel of the formulators and source of inputs into the legal reform process that has helped to alter the hitherto authoritarian political climate to one that observes civil, human and political rights, and increasingly economic rights. Along the way, non state actors have also become key partners with the government in charting socioeconomic development, in providing key basic services jointly and independently with the state, contributed to increasing public awareness of legal, political and economic rights, and in strengthening community development capacity. However, with the diminishing role of the state that in part is attributable to adoption of economic austerity policies, non-state actors have also, either knowingly or unwittingly or both, become conduits and agents of foreign influence in the archipelago economy and politics, at the central and sub national level. Other problems that still loom large range from heavy reliance on foreign funding, lack of domestically grounded mechanisms, best practices, and benchmarks they use in conducting of activities, fragmentation, shortage of organizational leadership and management skills.

Specifically, the contribution of non state actors to democracy can be outlined as follows. The contribution of NGOs has been in areas of increasing awareness of the public about political and civil rights, partners of the executive arm of government in increasing public socioeconomic wellbeing, controlled functions and behavior of the three arms of government (judiciary, executive, and legislature) in implementing their mandated functions, and through collaborating with foreign governments have helped in strengthening democratic institutions, public acceptability and engagement in the process, hence provided building blocks for strong democratic political culture.

Meanwhile, political parties have played vital role in laying the institutional framework through legislation and establishment of institutions of democracy; epitomes of public participation in public policy process, hence medium of public aspirations and interests; and established governance mechanisms and serve as guardians of the democratization process by providing oversight to programs implemented by the executive branch of government. The role faith or beliefs based non state actors to the democratization process, like other NGOs, has by and large been in filling the void, which the lean state has left in areas of community development by providing education and health services, strengthened people empowerment initiatives through the promotion of self help groups and other components of social capital, have inspired the establishment of pressure groups that serve as watch dogs of the state and its functionaries, legislature, and judiciary shaped the direction of policy by the government and participants<sup>9</sup> in the democratization process, and involved in forming political parties. In the meantime, the role academia has played so far played in the democratization process, has been in serving as a vital source of empowerment of the democratization process through contributing to institutionalization process (increasing the quality of legislation via contributing back ground academic papers for legislation), contributed research papers and report on best practices of certain programs, projects, laws and regulations, provided training and education on effective and feasible legislation, high socioeconomic impact programs and projects to legislators and bureaucrats, source of renewal and enrichment of state of knowledge, practices, and empirical research on effective public policy, provided knowledge and training to future leaders on modes of education, democratic institutions, and ways of institutionalizing thereof, and through providing knowledge and training to other non state actors on effective

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9 For instance, the President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, used the plummet in public opinion polls by the Democratic party, as the rationale to call for a revamp of the party as it prepared for 2014 elections. In a speech that saw the then incumbent Party chairman, who has been detained on charges of gratification /bribery that is now being linked to the troubled IDR 2.5 trillion Ham-balang sports center

methods, modes of operations, and advocacy , have contributed to laying the framework that is vital for building a sustainable democracy.

Moreover, through public Discussions, seminars, conferences and other public forum, academia has provided insights, enlightenment on principles, modes, merits and demerits, as well as limitations and constraints of democracy as a political system in general and in developing country socioeconomic, cultural and political setting, in particular. Public opinion polls have contributed to democratization process by increasing public awareness about the need to use certain criteria in choosing their representatives and leaders, stimulated debate on important issues that relate to the performance of the democratization process in general and politicians, the government and bureaucracy, political parties, and personalities in particular, have stimulated review and renewal of politicians and political parties once they detect sagging performance, hence all in all have served as guiding posts for the democratization process.

Students' organizations have served as constant, albeit nagging reminders of those actively involved in steering the democratization process to stay on course, raising alarm bells when need arose through demonstrations, in seminars, and conferences, and writing and expressing critical opinions in local and national mass media; have been breeding grounds for future politicians as well as nurturing centers for NGO activists, academics, and researchers on democracy; and participate in public awareness campaigns on the importance of engaging in political party politics. Meanwhile mass media, has as the medium through which decisions , aspirations, ideas, interests are expressed, disseminated, even shaped, have provided a strong connecting tissue to the democratization process; have provided all players in democratization policy the opportunity to ventilate their points of view on government policies, which with increasing variety, have exposed the general public to the *realpolitik* of democracy as opposed to the normative form, a process that has enhanced public understanding of the workings of democracy as opposed to autocratic regime; have provided the medium for the government to disseminate its policies, politicians to put their positions, stance, perspectives on various vital issues at the sub national and national level, to the test of public scrutiny, and provided forum for debate on issues of great importance in relation to the democratic process.

As regards ways forward, based on research results, a number of important policy recommendations can be drawn. Firstly, there is not much headway non state actors can make with regards to increasing their contribution to the democratization process unless they come to the realization that their future role depends much on their ability to consolidate their efforts at both the sub national, national, and ASEAN regional level. Carrying out activities in fragmented ways either based on type of non state actors or spatial sphere of influence, limits their access to vast research potential which joint efforts can garner through collaboration. That way, the dearth of skilled manpower, leadership, and financial resources which many non state actors face in their endeavors, can be overcome, which should enhance their effectiveness as change agents.

Secondly, the need to underpin activities non state actors do by principles, values, and core socio-cultural systems of areas where they operate, even as they use modified principles and modes of organizational management, borrowed from best practicing foreign organizations, is vital for making various components of non state actors, deepen their roots in the social, cultural and political fabric of societies where they undertake their activities. To achieve that, non state actors, should have a good understanding of socioeconomic-cultural-political context of societies they work in, which is why there is need to be prepared to learn from experts on social and development anthropology, sociology, development economists. It is one thing identifying problems societies face, but the task of getting to the core of the underlying causes of such problems,

is quite another. That way, activities of non state actors in the contributing to democratization do not end up creating new intractable problems.

Thirdly, while the current legal framework which has been lauded for creating an extremely conducive environment, and has been responsible for the emergence of a vibrant spectrum of non state actors that range from the very liberal to the most radical, hence raised fears of creating disharmony in society, existence of extremes in inclination should not be used as pretext to reinstate restrictions albeit veiled, on activities of non state actors. On the contrary, the enforcement of existing laws on transparency and accountability of all organizations, non state actors included, should be strengthened, widened, and streamlined to make it more predictable, reliable and non discriminatory.

Fourthly, since non state actors, have contributing to filling the development gap, which the diminishing role of the state has left in the wake of lean state role in basic service provision, there is better recognition of the importance of that role than allowing non state actors to benefit, both directly and otherwise, from state funding. By linking the availability of state funding at the national and sub national level to the track record on program effectiveness, transparency and accountability; expected program impact, and consonance of programs proposed with government programs, state funding should go along way of reducing some of the problem areas that have maligned non state actors such as over dependency of foreign funding, hence interests; little gross impact of activities due to too many activities spread over vast space; poor human resource, and leadership skills.

Fifthly, there is need for active state involvement in the delivery of political education to the citizenry, which should complement efforts of non state actors in general and NGOs and political parties in particular. Leaving such an element that is so important to the consolidating democratization process to the purview of non state actors who face multifaceted constraints are characteristic of developing country social, economic, and political context tantamount to abnegation of responsibilities of the state to equip the citizenry with the ability to make informed decisions having access to adequate, relevant, reliable and wide ranging knowledge on democracy make possible. This can be achieved through enriching the curricula of formal and non formal education; using prevailing state institutions at the national and sub national as entry points in encouraging citizenry to engage in democratic activities; incentives channeled through government programs and projects to entice public involvement in the democratic process.

Sixthly, there is need for more space for non state actors in general and academia in particular, in democratization process not only limited to serving as consultants, source of expert advice for legislators, judiciary, bureaucracy, and other government agencies in executing their functions, but preferably accorded a key role in the agenda setting, formulation, legitimization and adoption, and monitoring and evaluation of public policies. This can be done through legislation that has an inbuilt role of experts on all aspects of public policy process, which should be mandatory for all policy makers, at all tiers of government.

Seventhly, as non state actors are increasing becoming vital reform agents that reach regions where both national and sub national government have little foothold, there is no better of increasing their relevancy, impact, and sustainability than the state contributing substantially and regularly to equipping them with skills and competence they need to carry out their activities and responsibilities. This can be in the form of refresher training courses, scholarships on advanced education programs which can be offered jointly with international development agencies, and financing the convening and attending of seminars and conferences, by a select of members of civil society organizations that meet requirements.